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UNCLAS HARARE 001357

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/PD, AF/S, AF/RA

NSC FOR JENFAYI FRAZER

LONDON FOR GURNEY

PARIS FOR NEARY

NAIROBI FOR PFLAUMER

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: PREL PHUM KPAO ZI

SUBJECT: PRO-GOVERNMENT MEDIA COMMISSION NAMED

¶11. On June 1 Information Minister Jonathan Moyo appointed a six-member Media and Information Commission to license media organizations, accredit journalists, and assume other functions related to controlling the media in Zimbabwe. The Media and Information Commission is a statutory body mandated by the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act (AIPPA). Moyo named Dr. Tafataona Mahoso, head of the journalism department at Harare Polytechnic and strong supporter of the Mugabe administration and media control, as executive chairman of the Commission. Moyo also named two former editors of state-controlled newspapers -- Pascal Mukondiwa, former editor of the "Sunday Mail" and Jonathan Maphenduka, former assistant editor of the "Chronicle" -- to the panel. Other Commission members include retired Information Ministry official Alpinos Makoni; Dr. Rino Zhuwara, the head of Media Studies at the University of Zimbabwe, and Mr. Sephathe Mlambo, the principal of the government-run Mkoba Teachers' College. All members have been appointed for three years.

¶12. In a statement released on June 1, the government said the Commission was set up to ensure that "all Zimbabweans enjoy improved access to information and achieve effective ownership and control of mass media services in the country." The Commission would also "enforce professional and ethical standards in the media industry, as well as mount investigations and inquiries on media conduct."

¶13. The Zimbabwean office of the Media Institute of Southern Africa (MISA) is planning to protest the monolithic, pro-government composition of the Commission. Media industry leaders, international correspondents and journalists' unions complained that they were not consulted on the appointments.

¶14. Comment: During AIPPA's tortuous passage through parliament, critics warned that the Commission was likely to be packed with government supporters and become a rubber stamp for Information Minister Moyo's plans for controlling the media in Zimbabwe. The composition of the Commission's membership confirms those fears and sets up another mechanism for increased government control of all media operating in Zimbabwe.

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